

many, many judges who have been appointed by all previous Presidents of both parties; and Judge Richard Paez, for the ninth circuit, he is a sitting Federal judge. He has finally been promised a vote in March. But he has been waiting—listen to this—for 4 years for the Senate to vote on him. I nominated him 4 years ago.

Now, why is that? Because some people don't want these folks on the court, but they don't want you to know they don't want them on the court, because then you may not want them in the Senate. [*Laughter*] Now, this is not rocket science; this is what's going on. So if you don't want somebody on the court, but you don't want the folks back home to know you don't want them on the court, you just arrange for there never to be a vote.

It's not right. That they think that they're too progressive, they ought to stand up and vote them down. But they ought to—it's time to stop patronizing people or insulting them by playing games with them. Just vote them up or down. They're entitled to it, and they can take it. We can all take it. But when good people agree to submit themselves for Federal service—and they are good people and they are not disqualified by the investigation, they're elevated by the investigation, they are entitled to be voted up or down. And I ask you to help us.

Now, again I want to say, I hope that all of you when you leave here will remember that, even though the President should never get awards, I'm tickled to get this one. [*Laughter*] I hope you will remember the story of Elvia Morales' life and try to replicate it. I hope you'll remember these children who came to join us today from the Cesar Chavez Charter School. And I hope you will remember that we have just scratched the surface of what their lives, and our life as a nation, can be.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:09 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Enrique (Rick) Dovalina, national president, League of United Latin American Citizens; Elvia Morales, graduate, California State University at Sacramento, who shared her story of growing up as a child of immigrants; Irasema Salcido, principal and founder, Cesar Chavez Public Charter High School for Public Policy; former

Secretary of Energy Federico Peña; former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Henry G. Cisneros; and Major League Baseball players Barry Bonds, San Francisco Giants, Derek Jeter, New York Yankees, and Ivan Rodriguez, Texas Rangers. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Interview With Wolf Blitzer on CNN.com

February 14, 2000

2000 Presidential Election

Mr. Blitzer. Thank you very much, Lou. We are in the Oval Office, here with President Clinton. Mr. Clinton, thank you so much for doing this historic, first-ever on-line news interview with CNN.com.

I just want to set the scene for you and for our audience. This is not only being put forward on CNN.com and other Internet users, but also it will be seen simultaneously on CNN and CNN International. Fifteen minutes after we're completed, there will be an on-line video that people will be able to see, whenever, if they missed it. There will also be a transcript. They will be able to stream and see this as it goes on, on the Internet. So it's a historic moment for the new technology.

I know you've been fascinated by this, so let's get right at it. We have some E-mail questions. First one from Frank Williams in Tinley Park, Illinois: Mr. President, understandably, you're supporting the Presidential candidacy of Vice President Al Gore. But please share your personal political opinions of Senator John McCain and Governor George W. Bush.

The President. I think I should pass on that. I think—I've tried to stay out of this Presidential election. I'm not a candidate, and I don't think any headlines that I make should interfere with the ability of Senator McCain or Governor Bush to make their point. They're going to have an election in South Carolina, and then they'll go on to other States. And I think that—and at some point it might become appropriate for me to say something, maybe at the Democratic Convention or something, or if they make a specific statement about my administration or my record.

But I really believe that the American people—this is their year, their time. And I am going to vote for the Vice President, and I do support him, because I think he's been the best Vice President in our history by far. And I think he's got a good program for the American people, and I know him to be a good man who will make good decisions.

But I just don't think I should get in the middle of this Presidential race. It only interferes with the voters' ability to draw their own conclusions. And I trust them; they almost always get it right.

Mr. Blitzer. But you do know Senator McCain and Governor Bush?

The President. Sure.

Mr. Blitzer. You've met them, and you have your own opinions of both of them.

The President. I do, and I follow this campaign closely. I'm interested. It's the first time in over 20 years when I've just been an onlooker, so it's been fascinating to me as a citizen. But I don't think that I should say anything right now. And I don't mean to dodge the gentleman's question, but I just think that anything I do would only complicate their lives. And they're making their case to the people, and they're arguing with each other as they should be. And that's the way it ought to be done right now.

Hillary Clinton's Senate Campaign

Mr. Blitzer. All right, we have another E-mail question from Peggy Brown: Do you find it difficult, Mr. President, watching, listening to criticisms of the First Lady as she attempts to capture the Senate seat in New York?

The President. Sure. I mean, of course, I do. I now know how she felt all those years. You know, I love her very much, and I think—I know her better than anybody else, and I believe she'd be a great public official. And I hope the people of New York will put her to work. But if she's criticized, particularly if somebody says something I know is flatout wrong, it drives me nuts. I want to be able to say, "Gosh, I wish I could answer that one."

Middle East Peace Process

Mr. Blitzer. All right. We have a chat room that's going on even as we speak right

now. There's a question from one person: Are you optimistic, Mr. President, about the future for Middle East peace?

The President. Yes, I am. This is—we're in a little tough patch right now, because a lot of things are going on in the Middle East, the trouble in Lebanon right now. And we're down to the last strokes, if you will. We're down to the hard decisions. But I believe it is so clearly in the interests of the long-term security of Israel and the long-term interests of the Palestinians and the Syrians and the Lebanese to have a comprehensive peace. And I think we're so close on the substance, that I am optimistic.

Now, it will require courage, and it will require courage not just by the leaders but the people of those countries have to recognize that you cannot make peace unless you're willing to give as well as to get. But they ought to do it, and they ought to do it sooner rather than later. I think that the longer you delay something like this, when you have a moment of opportunity, the more you put it at risk. But I am basically optimistic.

Mr. Blitzer. You've invested a lot of your personal time and energy in the Israeli-Palestinian and the Israeli-Syrian peace process. Is it time for you, once again, to personally get involved and bring the parties together, do something to make sure this opportunity is not lost?

The President. Well, I am personally involved, even when I'm not in a public way. I'm always on the phone, always working this issue. But I think that there will have to be some forward progress here in the next few weeks, and I'll do whatever I can to facilitate it in whatever way I can. But beyond that, I don't want to say anything right now. We're working it, and the parties are working it.

Internet Security

Mr. Blitzer. Okay. Let's take another question from an E-mail that we received: Do you think, Mr. President, the Federal Government could do more for Internet security? I know you have a big conference, a big meeting coming up here at the White House tomorrow to deal with this sensitive issue, especially given the hacker problem that we saw in the last few weeks.

The President. Well, the short answer to that is, we probably can. And I'm bringing in a group of people to meet with me tomorrow, a lot of people from the high-tech community and from all our Government agencies. These denial-of-service attacks are obviously very disturbing, and I think there is a way that we can clearly promote security.

I think it's important that the American people not overreact to this. That is, we're into a whole new world with the Internet, and whenever we sort of cross another plateau in our development, there are those who seek to take advantage of it. So this is a replay of things that have happened throughout our history, and we'll figure out how to do it and go forward.

But I think on balance, no one could dispute what a great thing the Internet has been for our country and for the world. There are now over 200 million people that use it every day, about half of them here in the United States. And we just need to keep pushing it.

National Economy

Mr. Blitzer. And we're using it right now. Let's take another question from our chat room, from our CNN.com chat room: Mr. President, how will you advise Vice President Gore to keep this economy growing?

The President. Well, I think he's got a pretty good idea because he's been here with us and has been part of all the decisions that have been made the last 7 years. But if you look at where we are, the question is—we have the longest economic expansion in history; how do we keep it going?

I think we need to remember the fundamentals. We need to keep the debt being paid down, because that allows people in the private sector to borrow money not only to invest in new businesses or in their existing business but also to purchase things. So the continuing debt repayment is important. Keeping our markets open, to make us competitive and keep inflation down, is important. Investing in science and technology and research and in education and training and closing the digital divide to make sure access to the Internet is available to all Americans, those are the kinds of things that will keep this economy going.

Especially, I would say, we have both the moral obligation and an economic opportunity, by increasing investment in the areas which have been not so helped by the economic recovery—in the Indian reservations, the inner-city communities, the rural communities, where there haven't been a lot of new jobs. If you get growth there, it is by definition non-inflationary, because you get—they haven't had much. So you can lower the unemployment rate there, and you create new businesses, new employees, and new consumers at the same time.

Mr. Blitzer. Mr. President, there's another E-mail question that we have: How would you respond to arguments that you personally have had very little to do with the economic boom that the country has experienced during your administration?

The President. Well, I would respond by asking them to remember what it was like before we announced and implemented our deficit reduction plan and remember what a direct impact that had on interest rates, on investment, and on the stock market.

The American people deserve the lion's share of the credit. The high-tech community—we're part of it today—they deserve a lot of the credit. High-technology companies employ only 8 percent of our people; they're responsible for 30 percent of our growth. The companies that restructured in the eighties deserve a lot of credit. Everybody who's kept our markets open, guaranteeing low inflation and more competition, they deserve a lot of credit.

But nonetheless, we had a completely jobless recovery, what some people called a "triple dip" economy, until we finally said we're going to do something about this deficit. And when we did it, it was like breaking a dam, and the interest rates came down, and people started being able to get money and investing at an unprecedented rate, and the stock market started its upward march.

So I think the critical things we did—we had a good fiscal policy; we had a good policy on the markets; and we had a good policy on investing in technology and in people and education and training. And I don't think there's any question that had we not taken that first big bite out of the deficit, then the

growth would have been much slower than it has been.

Mr. Blitzer. Okay. I guess the person asking this question was also suggesting that the Republicans in Congress, Alan Greenspan, and the Internet economy, all of that combined to help you.

The President. And I agree with that. I agree. I think Chairman Greenspan did a good job. The main thing he's done, that I think he deserves a lot of credit for, is that he has been able to look at the evidence of the new economy and act on the evidence, instead of what you might call the old theology; otherwise he could have killed this recovery by raising interest rates too much too frequently in the past.

I think the Republicans in Congress—not a one of them voted for the economic plan in '93. But we did have a bipartisan majority in both Houses in '97 for the Balanced Budget Act, which continued what we were doing. And they deserve credit for that. And I have never—I try never to deny anybody else credit. This is an American achievement, not just mine. But if we hadn't taken that first big bite out of the deficit, I don't think we'd be where we are today.

Situation in Chechnya

Mr. Blitzer. All right, Mr. President, we have another question, an E-mail question: Why are the Western nations, why have they not done enough for Chechnya like they did for Kosovo?

The President. Well, first of all, I don't think the situations are parallel. But I think the Western nations have spoken out against the excesses. We believe—I think I speak for all the Western leaders; I certainly will speak for myself—that Russia had a right to take on the paramilitary forces who were practicing terrorist tactics but that it was a mistake to adopt the position that, in effect, ruled out negotiations with the elected officials in Kosovo, who weren't part of the terrorism, and to adopt tactics that cause a lot of civilian losses without any kind of corresponding gain. So I think we've been pretty clear about that. That's different from what happened in Kosovo, where Milosevic basically ran the whole country out based on their ethnic origin and had no intention of

letting them come back until he had crushed anybody's ability to say anything.

So I don't think that the situations are paralleled. But I think we have spoken out against the excesses in Chechnya and tried to get humanitarian aid in there and will continue to try to help the people of Chechnya and the legitimate political forces there. That's very different from what the paramilitary forces did. They have to bear their share of responsibility for what happened as well. I think some of them actually wanted the Chechnyan civilians attacked because they thought it would help improve their political views.

Russia-U.S. Relations

Mr. Blitzer. Okay, we have a followup question from our chat room. Let me read it to you as it's coming in: How can Americans know that America is really at peace with Russia?

The President. Because we're neither fighting with them nor on the edge of fighting. We've detargeted the nuclear weapons against each other. We are working to secure the nuclear weapons in Russia, to help them destroy nuclear weapons, to help safeguard the materials that remain. And I hope very much that after the next Russian election, we'll be able to make further progress on reducing the nuclear weapons there that we both hold.

Mr. Blitzer. And Vladimir Putin, the Acting President, is he someone that you can deal with?

The President. Based on what I have seen so far, I think that the United States can do business with this man. I think he's obviously highly intelligent; he's highly motivated; he has strong views. We don't agree with him on everything, but what I have seen of him so far indicates to me that he's capable of being a very strong and effective and straightforward leader.

Taxes and the Internet

Mr. Blitzer. All right, let's go back to another issue involving the Internet. This is a question: Mr. President, what role will you play in the debate on taxing Internet commerce?

The President. Well, we've played some role already. I signed a bill last year to have a 3-year moratorium on any kind of discriminatory or transactional tax, if you will, on the commerce on the Internet. I don't think that there should be any access or any other kind of discriminatory taxes, from my point of view, ever on the Internet.

The tough question is the whole question of what happens to sales that if they were not on the Internet would be subject to State and local sales tax. And the Governors are trying to work through that. I know Governor Leavitt has taken a particular interest in that—the Governor of Utah. I think that's something that we have to work through because we need—there are whole questions about the need for States to simplify their tax structures, and there are other questions there that have to be resolved. And I think that's going to take some time to resolve.

But I don't think we should have access taxes on the Internet or any other kind of discriminatory taxes because this is an important part of our economy, and we want it to grow. I think that for the States and the localities, they're going to have to keep working until they work through what the operational problems are.

Mr. Blitzer. Doesn't that discriminate, though, against stores—a bookstore, for example—

The President. Of course it does.

Mr. Blitzer. —that you have to pay tax—

The President. Absolutely, it does.

Mr. Blitzer. —but if you go to Amazon.com you don't have to pay taxes?

The President. It does, and that's the argument that the Governors are making and the argument a lot of the merchants are making.

Mr. Blitzer. Well, where's your position on that?

The President. Well, what I'm trying to do is get them together. There are also—the Internet people point out that there are also a lot of complications in the way State taxes are. And they have on their side the weight of Supreme Court law which basically was made from mail-order sales. The same argument was made against mail-order sales. And the prevailing legal position is that if you

don't have enough connections to a State, you don't have the obligation to collect and remit the sales tax.

Keep in mind, the sales taxes do—it's just that the seller doesn't have to collect and remit it. So most of the people I know who have Internet businesses are concerned about trying to make sure they get a simplified system, and they know what the drill is. Their main concern, however, is not having access to the Internet itself taxed. And I'm with them on that. And I'm trying to support the process that now exists to resolve the issue of how State taxes, the sales taxes, can best be collected in the way that's not too burdensome on the Internet.

You don't want to burden the Internet, but you don't want to put people who aren't making sales on it out of business. And we've got to find that right balance, and that's what we're working on.

Austria

Mr. Blitzer. We have another question from our chat room, an international question involving the political situation in Austria given the fact that Joerg Haider is now—his party is part of the Austrian Government. Let me read to you the question: What does the United States plan to do to make sure that Austria knows that Nazi sympathy will not be accepted?

The President. Well, I think we've made it quite clear that we do not support any expression of either sympathy with the Nazis in the past or ultranationalist race-based politics, anti-immigrant politics in the future. That, I think, is equally important here. And we've also tried to stay pretty close to where the European Union has been because, after all, Austria is a part of Europe, and they've been very tough in condemning what the Austrians have done here. So I think we're on the right track.

There is a delicate balance, however. You know, Austria is a democracy; this man's party got a certain percentage of the vote. He did it based on appeals that went well beyond a narrow race-based appeal. And we don't want to say or do anything that builds his support even further. But I think it ought to be clear to every Austrian citizen that we

in the United States do not approve of his political program or his excessive rhetoric.

Iran-U.S. Relations

Mr. Blitzer. Let's stay overseas. We have another E-mail question about U.S.-Iranian relations: I'd like to know, Mr. President, your view on the recent developments of Iranian-American relations as we, the Iranian youth, are really anxiously following political developments between the two countries and no doubt willing to finally see a healthy and mutually respectful relationship between the two.

The President. Well, that's what I want. You know, I said several weeks ago now—maybe a few months ago—that the United States had not been entirely blameless in the past in our relationships with Iran, and that we wanted a good relationship with Iran, that we did not support and did not condone anyone who would support terrorist actions, and that we had some difficulties with Iran, but we were viewing with interest affairs within Iran. We wanted the Iranian people to have a good democracy. We like to see these elections, and we want to be supportive of better relationships if we can work them out on ways that are mutually agreeable.

I think that one of the best things we could do for the long-term peace and health of the Middle East and, indeed, much of the rest of the world, is to have a constructive partnership with Iran. And I'm still hoping that that can materialize. A lot of that is now in the hands of the Iranian people and their elections and also the leaders of Iran. Some of them don't want that, but I think some of them may want that. And I think it's important that the genuine reformers there not be, in effect, weakened because of their willingness to at least talk to us, because I think the United States should always remain open to a constructive dialog to people of good will.

And I think that the estrangement between these two countries is not a good thing. I think it would be better if we could have a relationship.

Mr. Blitzer. As you know, Mr. President, in this regard, 13 Iranian Jews were accused of spying, and they're being held. Is this an

irritant in this? What do you want the Iranian Government to do on that front?

The President. Well, I have been assured by the Israelis that they were not spies. And I've done quite a bit of work on it. I'm very, very concerned about this, because people cannot—it is an irritant. The American Jewish community is very, very concerned about it, and we've done a lot of work on it. And I'm hopeful that justice will be done there and that no one will be punished for being a spy who isn't. That's not a good thing to do. And that, obviously, is a real—it's one of the sticking points.

But I think that there are other people of good will who the Iranians recognize are their friends, who want better relationships with them, who have also talked to them about this, and I'm hoping that it will be worked out in a satisfactory manner.

Media Mergers

Mr. Blitzer. Okay, Mr. President, I think we have another question from our chat room. Let's see what it is: How can we keep the media giants from squashing the little guy? I guess they might be referring to the recent merger of our own CNN-Time Warner-AOL. What's your answer to that?

The President. Well, I think the main things to me are—there are two sets of little guys, I guess—the one thing is you don't want to—and Steve Case has talked about this for many years, himself—

Mr. Blitzer. He's the chairman of AOL.

The President. The chairman of AOL—that it's important not to have access choked off. We want all these—if these mergers go through, we want them to lead to greater access to greater options to consumers at more affordable prices. Then the second thing is, you want other competitors to be able to get into the game. That's what all the big controversy was over the antitrust suit involving Microsoft. And that's handled in the Justice Department, strictly apart from the White House. So we had no role in that one way or the other.

And without expressing an opinion on that case one way or the other, I think what I favor is an American economy where people who have good ideas and new messages they want to get out ought to have some way to

do that, if they can generate a following. So that's what needs to be monitored here.

Some of this amalgamation I think is inevitable, given the possible synergy that could exist, for example, between a company like AOL and Time Warner, with all of its myriad publications and programs and networks. But you've got to have—there has to be some room for people who want to compete, and then there has to be a guarantee that consumers will not be choked off and their prices hiked and, in fact, they will have more access to more programs at more affordable prices. And I think those are the touchstones that ought to guide Government policy.

Small Business

Mr. Blitzer. All right. Let's take another question from our chat room, CNN.com chat room: What will the current and future administrations do to keep small business alive? Sort of related to the last question.

The President. One of the things that I'm very proud of about this economy—and again, I don't take total credit for this; this is part of our prosperity—but in every year I've been President, we've set a new record for starting small businesses—every single year.

I think that the Small Business Administration has an important role to play. I think that we have dramatically increased the number of small business loans that we finance, and we've concentrated on women and minorities, others who have been traditionally denied credit.

We have promoted aggressively for the first time what we call community development financial institutions, where we put Federal money into banks to try to help them make small loans to people who never could have gotten credit before. Just as we do around the world, we're now doing that here. And that's helping.

We've tried to continue to minimize the burden of Government regulations on small business. And I think that's important—to keep an entrepreneurial environment in America, so people can get access to venture capital if they've got an idea and start it.

So I think having the right conditions, and then having specific access to capital and technical support through the Small Business

Administration and the community financial institutions—that's the best thing we can do for small business.

President's Legacy

Mr. Blitzer. We have another question about the future in our chat room: What will the history books say about the Clinton Presidency?

The President. Well, I'm not sure, because that's for the historians to decide. But I think they will say, among other things, that we had a—we came into office with a different approach that was attuned better to the changes that were going on in the economy, in the society and in the world, and that we helped America get through this enormous period of change and transition—in the metaphor I use, to build our bridge to the 21st century—and that our country was stronger when we finished than it was when we began. I hope that's what they'll say, and I believe they will.

Post-Presidential Plans

Mr. Blitzer. All right, we have a follow-up question from our chat room. Let's take a look at that one: Mr. President, what are you going to do when you leave office? Which is now less than a year away. You probably—are you counting the days?

The President. No, not in a negative way. I mean, I'm not eager for them to be over. In fact, one of the problems I have is, I want to work even harder now to try to get as much done as I can.

When I leave, I'm going to establish a library and a public policy center.

Mr. Blitzer. That will be in Little Rock.

The President. And that will take a couple years to do. And I'm going to try to maintain a high level of activity in the areas that I'm particularly interested in. I've spent a lot of my life working on reconciliation of people across racial, religious, and other lines. I'm very interested in using the power of technology, like what we're doing now, to help poor countries and poor areas overcome what would ordinarily take years in economic development and education.

I'm very interested in continuing my work to try to convince Americans and the rest of the world that we can beat global warming

without shutting down the economy, that it's no longer necessary to use more greenhouse gases to grow economically. I'm very interested in promoting the concept of public service among young people and trying to get more young Americans to take some time off to serve in our National Government or the State and local government.

Those are four things I'll do. Basically, I want to try to be a good citizen. America's given me a lot, and more than I could have ever dreamed. I've loved being President. And I feel that I've acquired a certain level of experience and knowledge, that I owe that to my country. And along the way, I hope to write a few books and have a little fun, too. And I hope I'll be a member of the Senate spouses' club. I'm going to do my best to support my wife in every way I can.

But I just want to be a good citizen. I want to try to put what I've learned in a lifetime to use in a way that benefits the people of America and others around the world who I care about.

Mr. Blitzer. And you'll commute between Chappaqua, New York, and Little Rock, sort of?

The President. Yes, I'll spend some time in Little Rock for the next couple of years, you know, like I said, getting the facility up. And I'll spend some time with Hillary, as much as I possibly can, in New York. And then I'll probably travel some. And I hope we'll be able to travel some together. It depends on what happens in the next year.

But I'm really looking forward to it. I love this job. I don't know if I'll ever do anything again that I love the work as much as I love this. John Kennedy described it well. He said, basically, it challenges all your abilities. It challenges your mind, your emotions, even your physical strength. But I think that I can do a lot of things that will help other people when I leave here, and I'm going to do my best to do that.

President's Favorite Websites

Mr. Blitzer. All right, Mr. President, if you'll take a look at our chat room, the people who are participating in the CNN.com chat, they're participating in huge numbers right now. Let's take another question, though, from an E-mail person named Seth. He says

this: Mr. President, I have heard that you are an avid web surfer and on-line shopper. What are your favorite websites?

The President. Well, I wouldn't say I am avid. I did do some Christmas shopping for the first time on-line this year, though. And I even—I bought some things from the Native American craftspeople up in South Dakota, at Pine Ridge, which was really interesting to me.

But I love books, so I like Amazon.com. And I'm fascinated by eBay, because I like to swap and trade, and it reminds me of the old kind of farmer's markets and town markets I used to visit when I started out in politics in Arkansas so many years ago. I think the whole concept of people being able to get on-line and sort of trade with each other, and almost barter, is utterly fascinating to me.

Issues of the New Millennium

Mr. Blitzer. All right, we have another question, Mr. President. We only have a little time left. Let's take this from the chat room: Mr. President, what is the biggest issue facing Americans in the new millennium?

The President. Well, I think the most important thing that we have to do is to make up our minds that we are actually going to build a more united country out of our diversity and out of our groundbreaking technology and advances in science and technology. That is, I think that if you look around the world today, the biggest problems seem to be rooted in racial, ethnic, religious strife. If you look at America and how well we fit with a positive vision of the 21st century world and you look at the continuing problems we've had here, with these hate crimes, for example, the most important thing we could do is get our minds right and get our spirits right and realize that we have to learn to live with people who are different from us. We have to learn to keep our conflicts with them within proper bounds, so that our common goals override the differences between us.

If we build one America, that's the most important thing. The American people are so innovative, so creative, and we're so well-positioned for the future, everything else will work out. But if we allow ourselves to fall

into these deep divisions over—including political ones—differences of opinion are healthy; demonization is destructive and self-indulgent. And that's basically what we've got to work on.

If we can keep working together enough in creative tension, then everything else will work out. I'm confident of it.

Social Security Earning Limits

Mr. Blitzer. All right, Mr. President. We have time for one final question. It's from Wolf in Washington, DC—that would be me, by prerogative, as the moderator of this discussion, this on-line interview we're having: You know the Republicans today in the House of Representatives are pushing legislation that would remove the limits, ease the limits on Social Security recipients as far as their earnings after they reach 65 until 70—a very sensitive subject, affects a lot of people watching right now, how much money they could earn and still be eligible for Social Security. Will you work with the Republicans, support them, in eliminating those caps on earnings?

The President. Absolutely. I'm thrilled by this. I hope this is just the beginning of a signal from them that they're willing to work on this whole Social Security area.

I think we should lift the earnings limit for two reasons. One is, I don't really think it's fair for people—if you're 65 today in America, your life expectancy is 83. And you want to be alert; you want to be physically strong. And we know as people stay more active, they're going to live better, not just longer. So I don't think we should penalize them.

Secondly, I think as the baby boomers retire, it's going to be important to have a higher percentage of people over 65, if they want to, working. This will be good for our society. I'm strongly in favor of it.

If they will send me a bill—what we call in Washington-speak, a clean bill—that is, doesn't have a lot of other things unrelated to that littered to it—I will be happy to sign it.

Then the second thing I'd like to urge them to do is to think about my proposal to dedicate the interest savings that we get from paying down the debt because of the

surplus in the Social Security tax to the Social Security Trust Fund to do two things: Number one, put the life of the Trust Fund out to 2050; that will take care of most of the baby boom generation; and number two, do something about a single woman's poverty on Social Security. Married women's poverty on Social Security, about 5 percent; overall, seniors over 65, under 10 percent now. Single women on Social Security tend to live longer, tend to have less money. Their poverty rate is somewhere between 18 and 20 percent.

So I like getting rid of the earnings limitation. It's the right thing to do. Let's just do it. But then let's lengthen the life of the Trust Fund and do something about the poverty rate among women who are retired.

Mr. Blitzer. Mr. President, thank you so much for joining us, from the Oval Office. Always of course, great to be in the Oval Office, and one day when you're not in the Oval Office, you'll probably be excited coming back here as well.

The President. I will be. I'll always be excited to come here. And maybe I'll even get to do a web chat with you afterward.

NOTE: The interview began at 1:43 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Gov. George W. Bush of Texas; President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro); Gov. Michael O. Leavitt of Utah; Austria's Freedom Party leader Joerg Haider; and Steve Case, chairman and chief executive officer, America Online. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Radio Remarks on Funding To Make Communities More Livable

February 14, 2000

Across America, communities are struggling to protect precious lands so their children will have places to play, hike, and enjoy the great outdoors. Today I'm announcing nearly \$60 million in new grants to help communities in all 50 States create parks, preserve forests, and save open space.

And the lands legacy initiative in my new budget will provide permanent funding so that communities can conserve additional lands year after year.